



HEART *of the* CUMBERLAND

Hope and healing for the grieving

Grief is a natural part of life and it happens to all of us. Grief and loss can happen in different ways – death, divorce, deployment, incarceration, or other situations of abandonment. Often our situation seems so overwhelming that we hide our grief inside, not allowing ourselves to feel and express the stages and emotions that we naturally need to go through. We wonder if our feelings are normal, we are scared and angry, we feel all alone, and we wonder if we will ever not be in pain again – indeed will we ever feel happy again? And if these feelings are pushed inside, they become unresolved grief that can derail any stage of life. Unresolved grief in children and teens can lead to defiance, low self esteem, risk-taking, substance abuse, even suicide. And adults often cannot tolerate unresolved grief any better than the younger ones.

But our HEARTS *can be* HEALED *when we* REALIZE *we are* NOT ALONE.

At **HEART *of the* CUMBERLAND**, our mission is to provide hope and healing for the grieving through Christ-centered peer support. A peer support group is a forum for mutual acceptance, understanding and self-discovery through communication with peers who have been in similar situations. Children's groups, teen groups and adult groups share their experiences with peers and feel the love of Christ through caring adults who are trained to help them.

HEART *of the* CUMBERLAND provides faith based peer support groups at our Center in Cookeville, TN for adults, teens, and children – indeed, whole families often attend their age-grouped sessions at the same time. Our 10 week program runs in the evening several times a year, and is **always free of charge to participants**. Our facilitators guide the participants through a curriculum that creates an atmosphere for which they can come to terms with their loss. Participants form bonds with others in their group, and our Center hosts other activities for the groups including support-suppers, memorial dinners, and balloon releases through the year.

Comments from a prior participant at our center:

- “We came and were just amazed. We sat in with some parents and grandparents who had lost loved ones, and it was a tremendous healing process for us.”

HEART of the CUMBERLAND is also making great strides in the development of grief peer support school groups. School support groups have been conducted in Putnam County and neighboring Overton County, as our facilitators work closely with guidance counselors to provide weekly peer groups during non-academic time. Services and all supplies are provided free of charge to participants and to the schools. In the 2013/2014 school year, over 340 students from Putnam and Overton county participated in our school support groups – DOUBLE the previous year’s participation!

After participating in one of our school support groups, here are some comments from Middle Schoolers about what they learned:

- “I am not alone.”
- “That it’s okay if your family is different.”
- “Other people have troubles and situations that you may not realize and you don’t always know what they’re going through.”
- “I can encourage other people through the pain I’ve been through.”
- “How to forgive yourself and start on a path forgiving others.”
- “How to do the right thing when the going gets tough.”

People do not always have a network of friends, family, church or community connections to lean on when they have a need - even when they do, it is often difficult to begin sharing their burden with them. Guided peer groups can help on this journey to healing and point people toward the path to hope - **HEART of the CUMBERLAND** wants to help.